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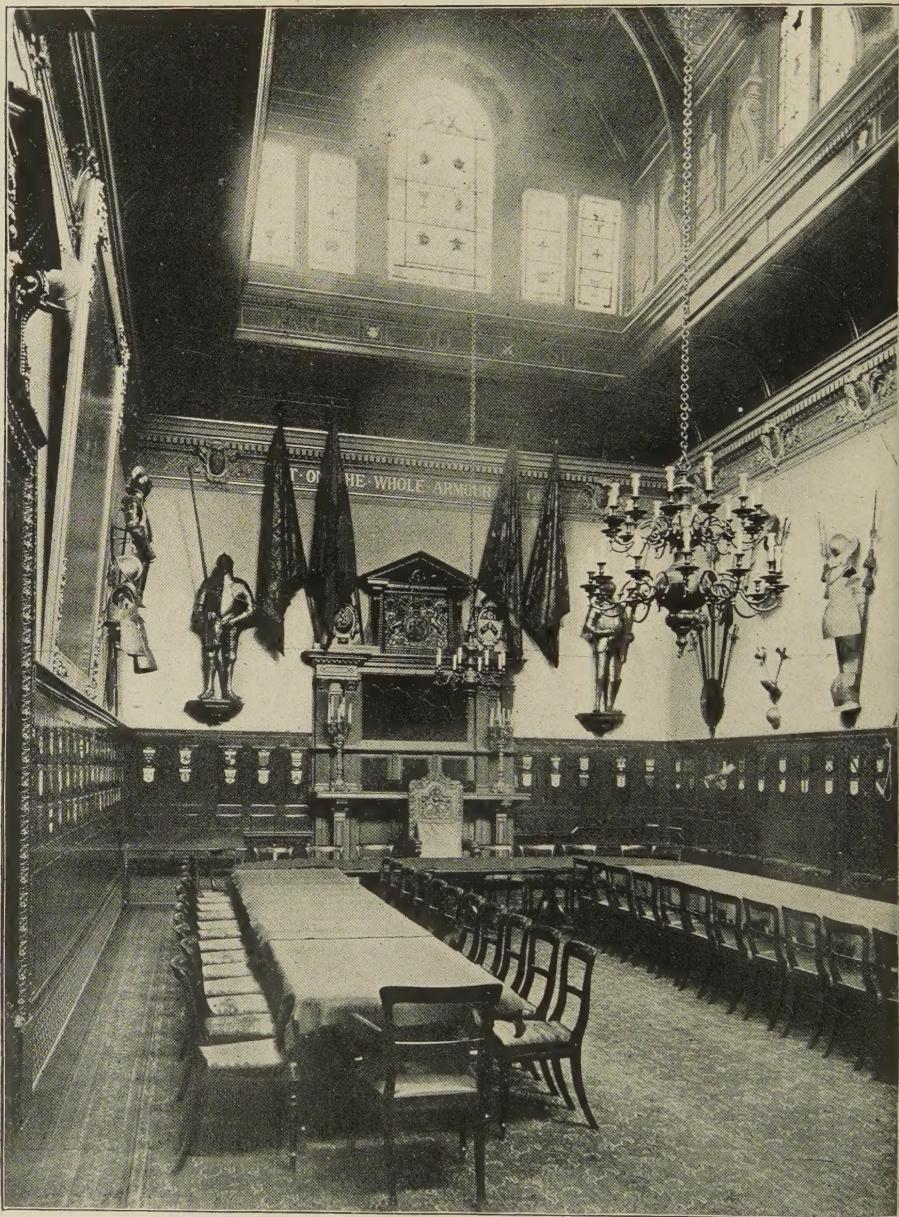
THE GUILD HALLS OF LONDON.

PERHAPS there are no corporate bodies now existing in England which can trace their beginnings in more unbroken line to the earliest recorded historical events of the country, and surely none which have exercised so great political and civic influence, as the famous trade-guilds of London. There now exist in that city about one hundred such associations, the twelve most prominent and influential of them being styled the Twelve Great Livery Companies, and these associations exercise no slight share in the government of the world's metropolis. From rights which have survived to them from ancient charters, their members, although self-elected and not deriving their power from any popular suffrage, still choose the Lord Mayor of London from among the twenty-six aldermen of the city's wards, and his election takes place at the Guildhall, or central office of all the companies.

The ceremony is a most interesting one. The floor of the Hall is strewn with aromatic herbs, which is perhaps the only survival of the mediaeval method of carpeting a floor with rushes. The aldermen heads of the city wards, gather in their surlet gowns, and are met by the representatives of the companies, all clad in the robes or "liveries," which, by ancient customs bestowed upon them, they are privileged to wear, whence their name of "Liverymen" is derived. To this assembly the recorder or law officer of the city then

makes a short, set speech, declaring that from the time of King John the liverymen have possessed the rights of election which they are now to exercise. The liverymen thereupon proceed to choose, by vote, two of the aldermen for the office of Lord Mayor, and from these two the incumbent Lord Mayor and the aldermen with formal ceremony select one, who is to become Lord Mayor of London for the ensuing term. This selection the liverymen must ratify by stating that the man named is their free choice. On the evening of his election the new Lord Mayor presides at a splendid feast in the Guildhall, and among the illustrious company assembled not the least picturesque figures are the liverymen of London in their gowns edged with fur, wearing the golden chain-like collars from which depend jewelled badges.

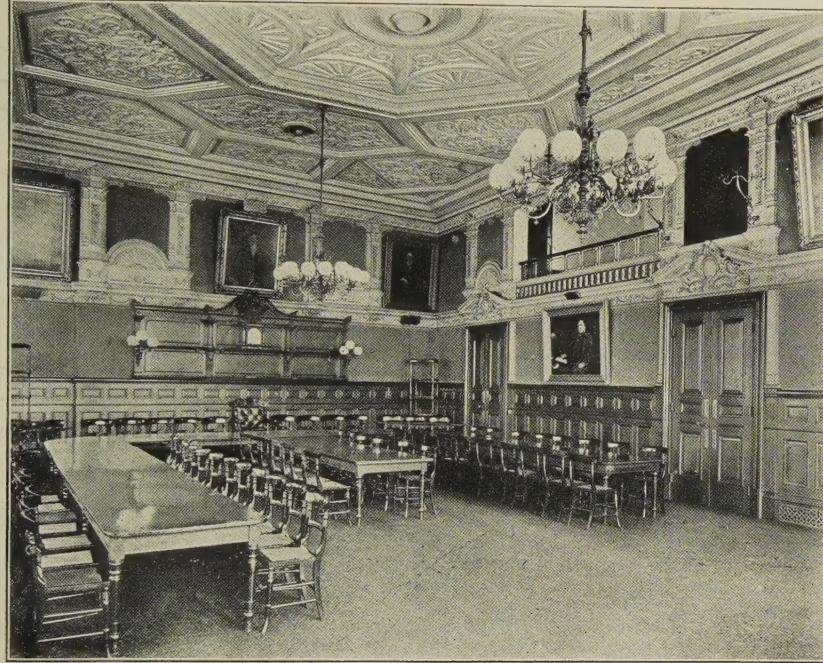
Not only do these private companies thus possess civic powers which are strange to Americans of more republican traditions, but they exercise other inherited privileges of no small importance. The Company of Stationers records and grants all copyright privileges in England. The Fishmongers Company controls and regulates the sale of fish in the metropolis. Every piece of gold or silver plate manufactured in London must be stamped or "hall-marked" at the Hall of the Goldsmiths with the crest of their order, the panther's head. The Company of Clothworkers still guard the silver yard-stick which is the standard for



ll English and American measures, and other companies possess and exercise similar public functions and authorities.

Through the increase of their common funds and from the numerous legacies which have been left to them, these companies have become very wealthy. The corporate moneys of sixty-four of them amount to £484,475. The richest company is that of the Drapers, which administers £50,000 and the Mercers own, among one hundred ninety-five members, £4800. In

like, all share in the benefit of these funds. The Drapers gave £10,000 toward the building of the People's Palace, and support a large training school for boys in connection with it. Guy's Hospital was founded by a member of the Worshipful Company of Stationers. A member of the Mercers Company founded St. Paul's School; and the Mercers have recently opened a great technical institute for both sexes. As an example of the trusts which they administer, we may mention that the



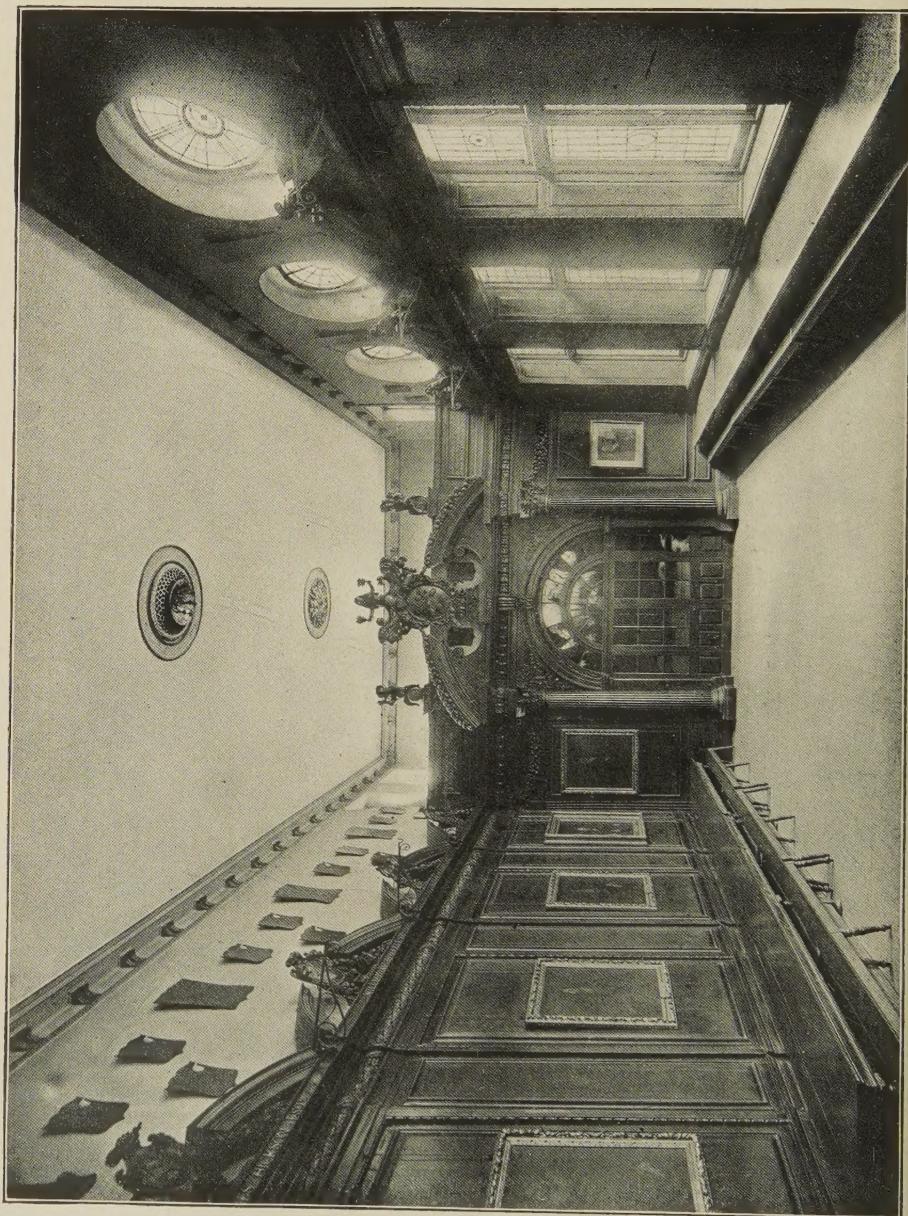
BUTCHER'S HALL

BOARD ROOM

addition, the trust incomes of fifty of the companies amount to £201,427 and the total income of all foots up to no less than £750,000. These incomes are, however, by no means considered by the companies as to be applied to their private uses. Much of the money is, as has been said, in the nature of trust funds which they are bound to disburse according to specified provisions; and in fact, with the exception of a comparatively small amount set aside for public entertainments, private feasts and ceremonies, and the maintenance of their walls, their general incomes are either administered for certain set purposes of trust, or expended in charities. Orphanages, almshouses, prisons, schools, hospitals, technical training colleges and the

Apothecaries Company owns a large estate in Chelsea on which a botanical garden was founded in 1672, and given to the Company on condition that they should add to the garden at least fifty varieties of rare plants annually until the number reached two thousand. This they have done, making the most complete collection of medical herbs and simples in the world. It was in this garden that, in 1687, the first attempt was made to grow plants in an artificially heated atmosphere. It will thus be apparent that, though the members of these companies are self-elected, they are by no means unworthy of the public trusts and functions which under royal charters they still exercise.

Almost all these Guilds can trace their



origins far back in English history, although many important records concerning them were destroyed in the great fire of London. The name "guild" is derived from the Saxon *gildan* meaning to pay, and the original guilds were formed to comply with the exactions of a Saxon law, called "frank-pledge," by which it was ordained that every freeman over fourteen years of age should give securities to keep the peace. To afford such securities, groups of ten families entered into association, and bound themselves to produce any of their members who had committed offence, or, in default of this, to make satisfaction to the injured party. To provide for the payment of fines each guild maintained a common purse. Meantime, in order to better identify the members, as well as, probably, to keep a closer watch upon them, each association assembled at stated periods at a common feast. It is in these associations that we see the germ of the present trade guilds; and to this day the common

purse and the feast at stated intervals are invariable institutions among them.

Even during the Anglo-Saxon period a change in organization came about, and instead of being banded together by families they combined, as a more natural form of association, by trades; and such trade associations not only fulfilled their original purpose, but added other features for mutual protection and commercial advantage. At the time of the advent of the Normans so firmly were these trade guilds established in London that they

forced William the Conqueror to recognize their corporate existence by giving them the first royal charter which is extant; and this charter still remains in the city archives, beautifully written in Anglo-Saxon characters on a slip of parchment. It may be thus translated:—

"William, the king, friendly salutes William the bishop and Godfrey the portreeve, and all the burgesses within Lon-

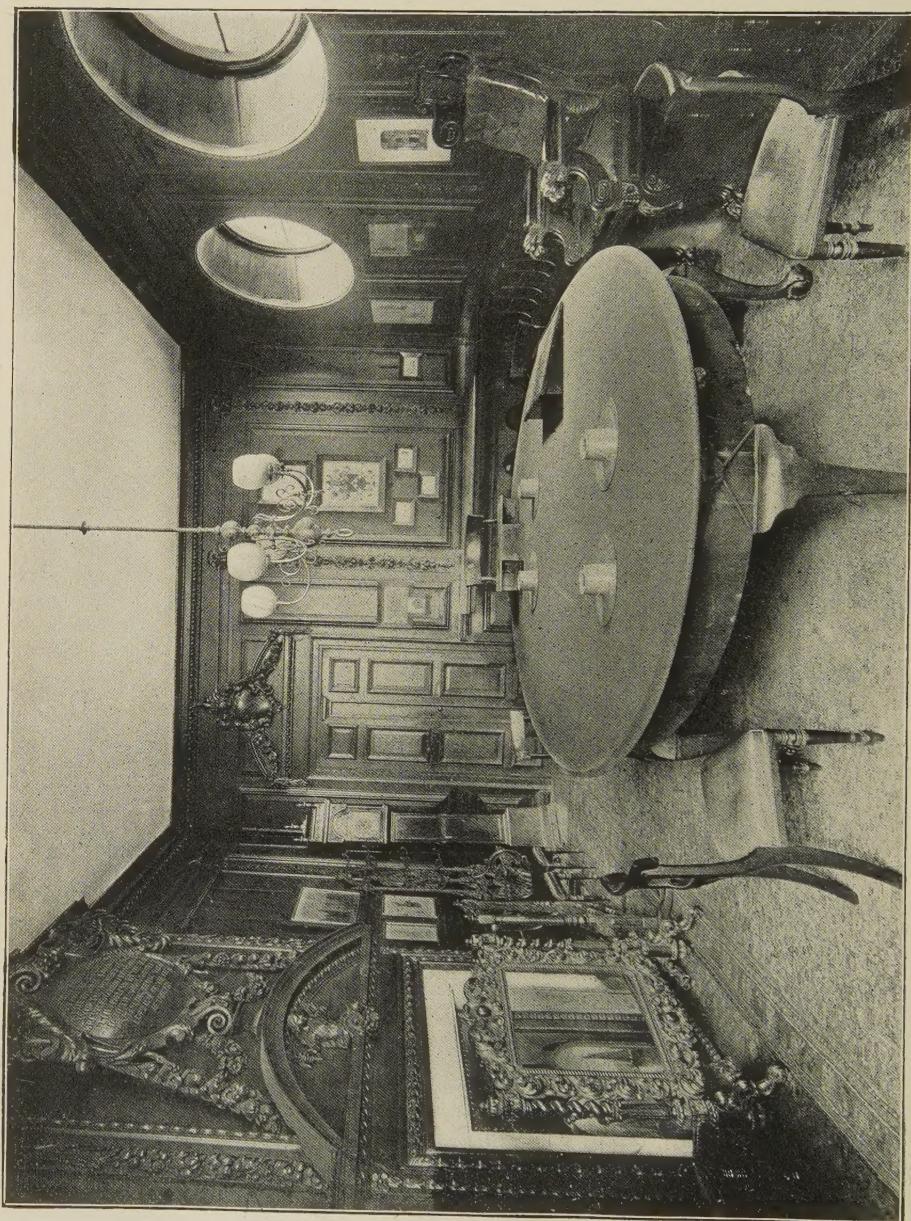
don, both English and French. And I declare that I grant you all to be worthy, as you were in the days of King Edward; and I grant that every child shall be his father's heir, after his father's days; and I will not suffer any person to do you wrong. God keep you."

Under the Norman rule, however, the growth of guilds was much interfered with at first. Henry I. commanded that all should receive royal license; and he subjected several guilds to heavy fines because they had been established without license, or exercised their functions inde-

pendent of it. This penalty fell heavily on London, where the confraternities were very numerous. They were encouraged by Henry II.; but as they increased under this patronage, and were much given to parading with their respective uniforms or "liveries" and banners, collisions between rival trades became so frequent that at length, under Henry IV., they were forbidden to wear their liveries. In subsequent reigns they were permitted to appear in them at coronations, and finally it became necessary to obtain the royal license



CARVED ARM-PIECE OF CHOIR STALL
CATHEDRAL OF GENOA
SIXTEENTH CENTURY



for appearing in public with their insignia.

During the reign of Edward III. the fraternities or Companies of Liverymen as they had now come to be called, not only received specific charters, but the king, having found that they were the main-spring of trades in his kingdom, resolved to raise them in public estimation, and became himself a member of the Company of Merchant Tailors, an example which the nobility were not slow to follow; and it is a despised Company that cannot now-a-days boast of many names of rank upon its rolls.

In the records of the thirty-sixth Parliament of Edward's reign, a petition from the commons is preserved, which shows not only how powerful these guilds had by that time become, but also that the evil of "trusts," recently so much lamented, is not of such modern origin as we may suppose. This petition recites that the Guild of Grocers had become so great and monopolistic as to threaten ruin to the numerous other fraternities that had now sprung up, and complains that they "engrossed all manner of merchandise vendible, suddenly raised the prices of such merchandise within the realm, and by ordinance made amongst themselves, in their own society, kept such merchandise in store to be sold at higher rates in times of dearth and scarcity."

From this time forward we find many records of charters granted to these companies, and the granting of such charters, for which the guilds were made to pay liberally, became a strictly business transaction, being one of the methods by which the sovereigns raised money for their numerous wars in France and Scotland. From 1280 to 1420, twelve companies were chartered; from 1420 to 1740, ten companies received charters; during the fourteen years of Elizabeth's reign, five companies were incorporated; and with the arrival of the poverty-stricken Stuarts, a shower of charters were granted, James granting seventeen and Charles twenty-two. With the expulsion of the Stuarts, however, the granting of charters practically ceased, only one having been issued since that time, and that one, appropriately enough, to the Fan Makers in the bric-à-brac age of Queen Anne.

Under the Restoration the guilds fared hard. The great fire of London destroyed their halls and warehouses. Charles's

idiotic foreign policy, and the high-handed "quo warranto" proceedings which their wealth brought upon them, crippled their gains and liberties; and after the advent of the German dynasty, with its importation of the German aristocratic contempt for trade, the younger sons of nobles and country gentlemen ceased to enter mercantile pursuits.

But we find—and to their credit be it said—that the guilds have on the whole, and throughout their history, devoted themselves wisely to the promotion of public advantage, always standing shoulder to shoulder against every attempt at royal encroachment upon the freedom of the commoner, advancing wise measures for the government of the city and the undisturbed conduct of business, and taking all proper care that no member of their fraternity or any merchant of their trade should sell under weight or produce articles below a certain standard of quality.

The history of each of the companies is very similar. To briefly follow one of them, the Worshipful Company of Grocers, for example, let us quote the account recently given by Mr. Moore in the *Century Magazine*.

"On June 12, 1345," he writes, "a number of pepperers, as the grocers were then styled, met together at dinner by agreement at the town mansion of the Abbot of Bury in St. Mary Axe. They talked their common affairs over, and agreed to form themselves into a voluntary association to settle trade disputes, to help poor members, and to say prayers for the souls of the departed members. They took St. Anthony for their patron, elected two wardens to preside over them and a chaplain to pray for them. Ever since, they have met each year on St. Anthony's day and dined together, electing new wardens and crowning them with garlands. In 1427 they bought some land in Old Jewry, a street leading out of Cheapside, there built a hall, and there remain to this day. After their association had been in existence eighty-four years, the Grocers obtained a charter from the king, in the year 1429; and soon after were given the public duty of inspecting and cleansing all the spices sold in London. King Charles II. became their master, and they always dine on the day of his birth, the 29th of May. At the end of his reign, in 1685, they were nearly

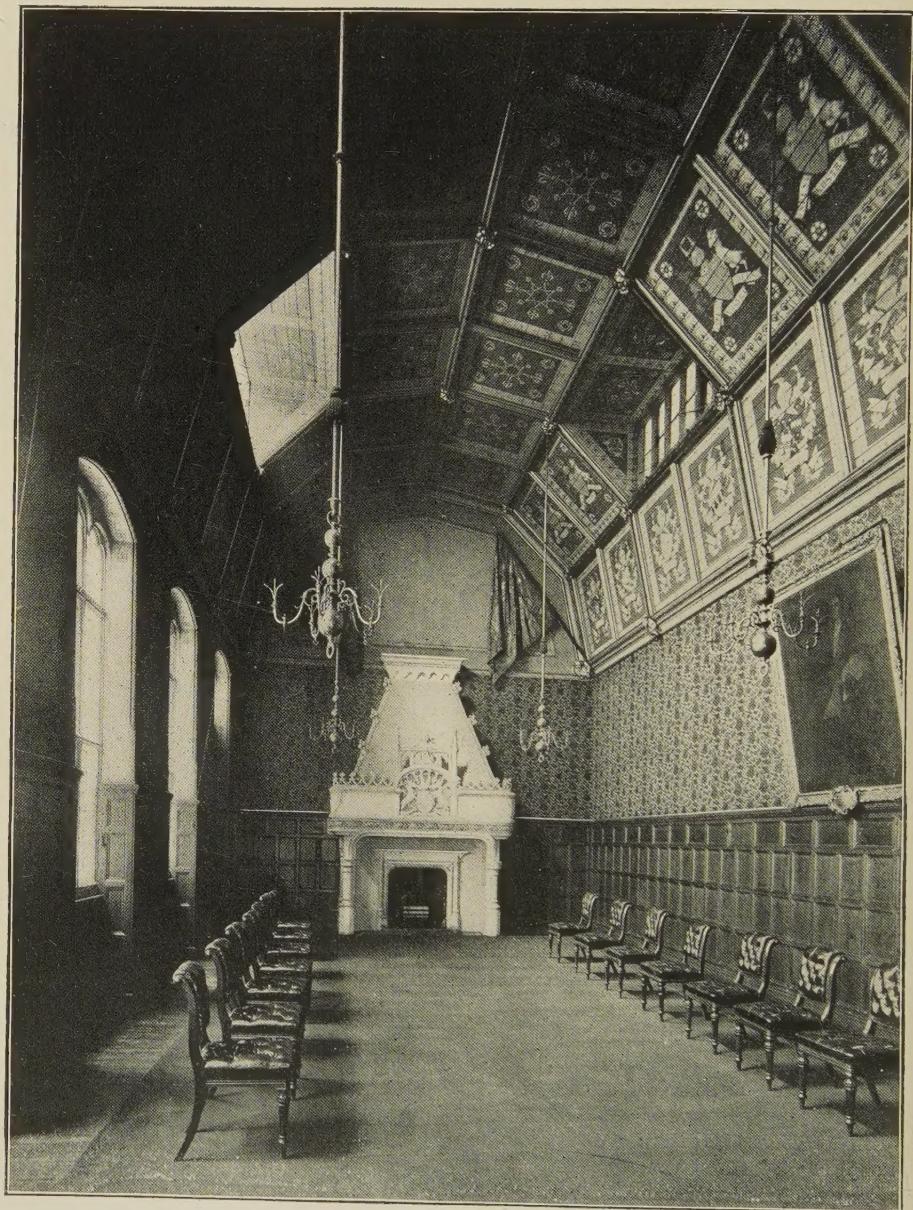


PLATE LXIII

CURRIER'S HALL: GREAT H

destroyed by the tyrannical proceedings under which the king tried to seize their charters and abolish their privileges and those of London and other cities. They just managed to survive the horrors of the 'quo warranto,' as this proceeding was called, and joyfully elected William III. master when he came to the throne and made civil liberty once more secure. From this day to our own they have grown richer, while their functions as cleansers and inspectors of spices have slowly become obsolete. Now with much good fellowship and cheerful hospitality they administer charities, do good in other ways and harm to no one; so that all citizens may heartily join in their grace, 'God preserve the Church, the Queen, and the Worshipful Company of Grocers! Root and branch, may it flourish forever!'

Such, with slight variations in detail, has been the history of the companies. Each began as a voluntary association, received in the fourteenth century, or later, a charter from the crown, exercised control over its especial trade, was nearly destroyed by Charles II., and has since steadily increased in riches; while, with a few exceptions, changes in the nature of commerce have worn away all its mediæval functions except the happy one of promoting good-fellowship among men.

Membership in one of these companies was originally to be obtained only by going through a period of apprenticeship in its trade and by money payment. In later

times, however, the actual apprenticeship became obsolete, so that the companies of London are now, in this respect, practically upon the same basis as ordinary clubs, to which an applicant who possesses the requisite qualifications may be elected upon payment of an admission fee. Places in the membership are also inherited from father to son, and families belong to certain companies for generations. It has

also become unnecessary for an applicant to belong to the trade which the guild represents; and indeed only three of the greater companies, the Drapers, the Apothecaries and the Goldsmiths, retain more than a small minority of actual craftsmen among their members.

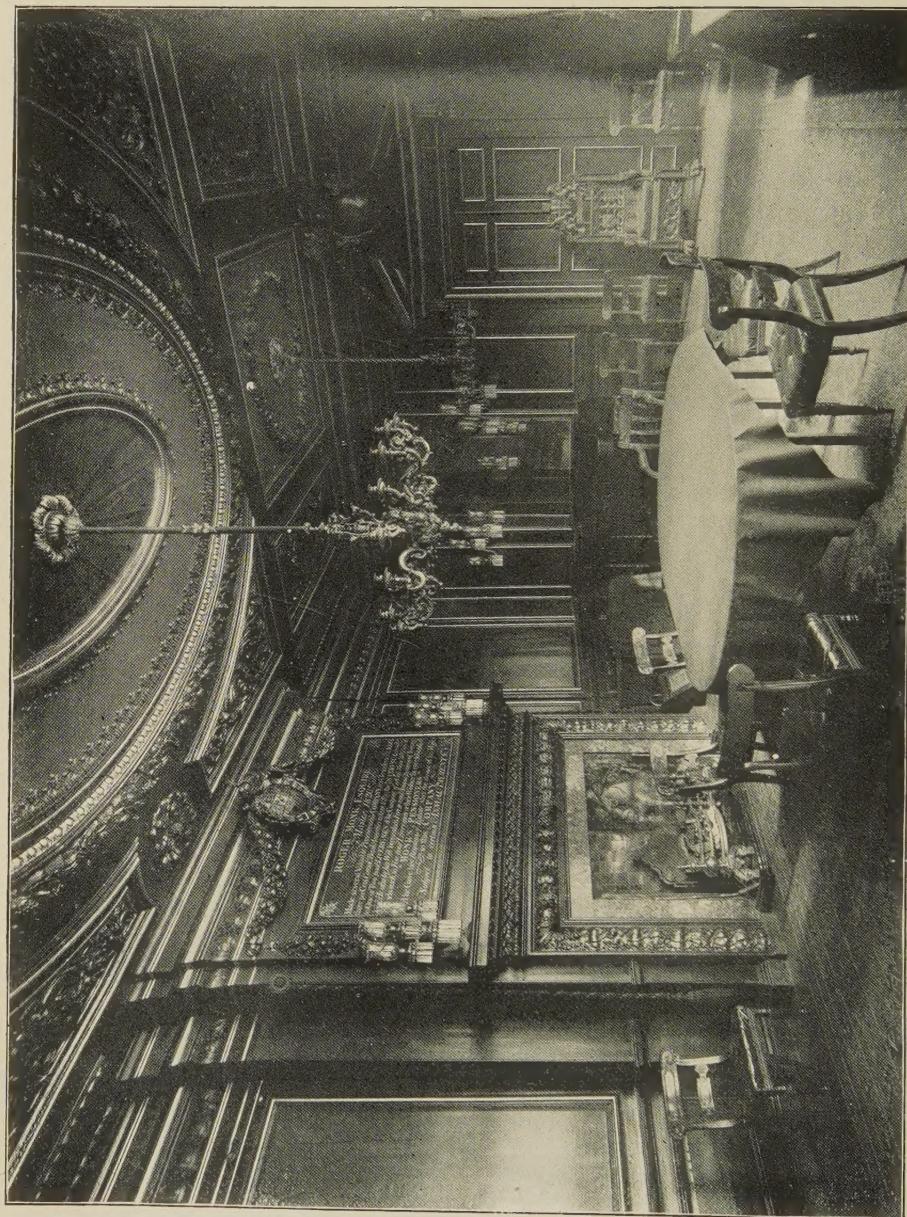
With the exception of the public duties and the administration of the charities before mentioned, the only functions of the guilds at present are those of hospitality and good fellowship. The livery companies take it upon themselves to do much of the hospitality of the city of London. They give receptions to royalty and distinguished men; they take large part in

such civic festivities as the Lord Mayor's show; they make gifts to the reigning family upon their marriages, and the fame of their city dinners has passed into a proverb. The same writer from whom we have just quoted thus describes one of these guild dinners:—

"Happy the man who is entertained by the Guild of the Body of Christ of the Skinners of London, as the company style



DETAIL OF CARVING
CHURCH OF S. GIUSTO, LUCCA
TWELFTH CENTURY



themselves in all official documents. A beadle receives him with lofty courtesy and calls out his name as he ascends a handsome staircase. At the top the guest suddenly finds himself in the august presence of the master and wardens. They shake hands with him and bid him welcome as if he was the one guest who, long invited and never coming, had at last appeared and satisfied a lifelong wish on their part to see him.

"The guest seems to have entered into their very hearts, when suddenly he feels that they can smile on him no more, and that the absorbing attention with which they receive him is exchanged in an instant for total neglect. It is merely that these high functioners are receiving another guest, and so another and another, till the list is complete and dinner is served. All dinners of all companies are noble feasts, and the tables of the great companies are brilliant with splendid pieces of plate. Among the skinners' plate are some curious flagons made in form of beasts and birds. The skinners like to tell how these are used. On the day of election of master and wardens, the court, or governing body of the guild, is assembled in the hall, and ten blue-coat boys, with the almsmen of the company, the master and wardens, all in procession, preceded by trumpeters blowing blasts, march round the hall. Three great birds of silver are brought in and handed to the master and wardens. The birds' heads are screwed off, and the master and wardens drink wine from these quaint flagons.

"Three 'caps of maintenance' are then brought in. The old master puts one on. It will not fit him. He hands it to another, and he to another, and both declare that it does not fit. Then it reaches the Skinner who is to be master for the year. Wonderful to relate it fits him to a nicety. The trumpeters flourish their trumpets, the skinners and the almsmen shout for joy. The wardens next find out whom the cap fits, with the other two caps of maintenance, and so the high authorities of the guild are installed for the year."

The most expensive and magnificent of the feasts ever given by the united companies was that given to the Emperor of Russia, the King of Prussia and the Prince Regent in 1814, in celebration of the end of the Napoleonic wars. The associated

merchants of London, whose gold had made these wars possible, invited to their table the three most powerful monarchs in Europe, and spent upon a single entertainment the sum of £25,000, while the gold and silver plate upon which the food was served was valued at equal amount, the larger part of it being the gift of kings, and some of it the work of Benvenuto Cellini's own hands.

All of the most important of the companies possess halls of their own, and there are more than fifty of these halls in London, each of which contains something beautiful and curious. Most of them, as we have said before, were burned in the great fire, but were rebuilt upon the same sites. The fact that the interiors of these halls are so little known is due to the exclusiveness of the companies, which do not invite sight-seers.

In exterior they are generally plain and the door which leads to them is not labeled or in many cases to be distinguished from the doors of offices or warehouses near it. "In a few cases," writes Mr. Moore, "a small and insignificant brass plate near a bell-handle bears the word 'Beadle,' or sometimes even lifts the veil of mystery a little higher and records a name, as 'Weavers' Hall.' To ring the bell requires nearly as much courage as that of Jack the Giant-killer when he blew the horn that hung at the giant's gate. The beadle, or more often the sub-beadle,—for the beadle himself is too great to be lightly disturbed,—appears. You feel instantly that you are intruding, that you had no right to ring, and that you are in much the position of a man who has impertinently rung at the door of a private house and asked to see the drawing-room. If you have an introduction, above all, if you know any one on the court of the company, as its governing body is called, the beadle unbends a little, and you are admitted. You enter a great paneled hall decorated with armorial bearings, with portraits, and with banners. You are in the very heart of the city of London, where land is worth £100,000 or more an acre, yet there is a delicious garden, a court-yard recalling Italy, a splashing fountain, or a noble old tree. This element of surprise, of contrast between the rushing crowd in the street outside and the perfect fourteenth century stillness within the halls of these ancient



PLATE LXV

COACHMAKER'S HALL: BOARD ROOM

guilds, adds much to the pleasure of seeing curious things at which you are not asked to look. You feel in a few minutes how great a thing it is to be a merchant tailor or a cloth-worker or a grocer, superlative and unattainable; and you walk round the hall with the beadle in a deferential, humble frame of mind only comparable to the



CARVED CHOIR STALL

BAPTISTERY, PISA

MODERN (1856)

sensation of a pilgrim who is just about to kiss or has just finished kissing the toe of his holiness the Pope.

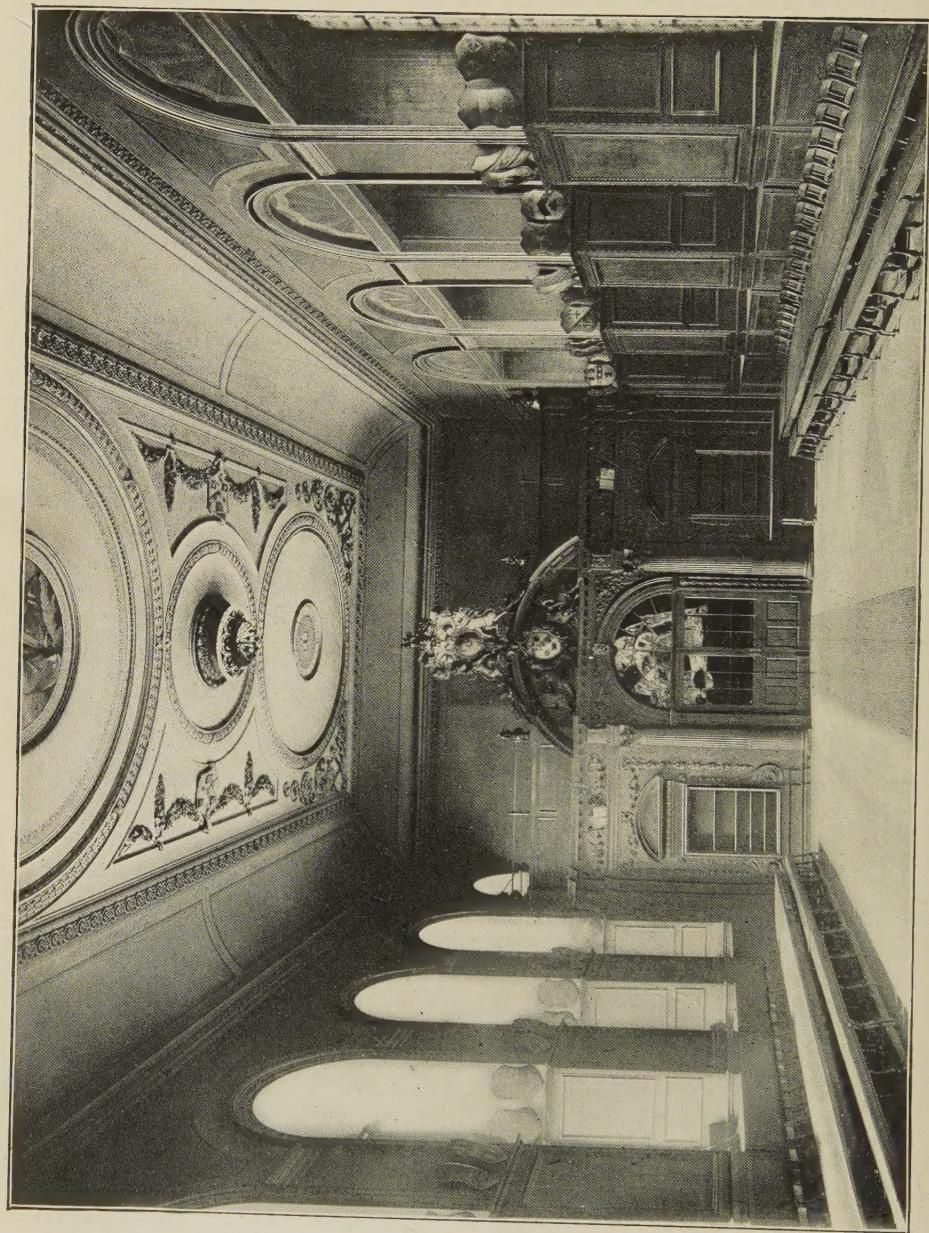
"The halls of nearly all the companies were consumed in the great fire, so that most of their buildings date from the last years of the house of Stuart, and in later times some have been rebuilt in a style of

profuse magnificence. Nevertheless, there is hardly one which does not contain some picturesque bit of architecture or wood-carving, curious portrait, quaintly carved figure, beautifully illumined charter, or splendid piece of plate. The wood-carving in many is superb,—in none finer than in the Brewers' Hall,—and the combination of the dark color of old oak with the bright tinctures of painted armorial bearings occurs in endless and always picturesque variety. The quite self-content and the half-private character of the guilds have prevented a thorough investigation of their history. They themselves feel, as any one who with the feeling of ownership dines often in such halls as theirs must come to feel, that no one but one of themselves could do them justice; that a haberdasher alone could write of haberdashers, a grocer of grocers, a vintner of vintners. One or two good histories of particular companies have been written by members, but all the general accounts are deficient in thoroughness. It must be remembered, too, that these ancient corporations suffered a terrible shock at the hands of the law-officers of Charles II., who forced open their muniment chests, asked why and wherefore about everything, and demanded their money or their lives. The 'quo warranto' was hardly forgotten when more modern attacks began; royal commissions were threatened, and the guilds which had never done harm, and thought that merit enough, were perpetually asked why they did not do good, and those who obviously did good, why they did not do more.

"Thus assailed from time to time, but so far surviving assault, no wonder that the companies are a little suspicious of strangers and not too anxious to admit criticising historians."

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